

UNCLASSIFIED

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CONFIDENTIAL

Page: 294

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CONFIDENTIAL

PTQ7800

PAGE 01 CARACA 00853 01 OF 03 201320Z
ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	AID-00	ACQ-01	CEA-01	CIAE-00
	COME-00	CTME-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00
	EXIM-01	E-00	FRB-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	ITC-01
	L-01	ADS-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00
	PM-00	PRS-00	P-00	CIO-00	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00
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R 201239Z MAR 98
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0156
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY QUITO
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USIA WASHDC 1486
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000853

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/15/01
TAGS: PGOV, ECON, MARR, VE
SUBJECT: STRIVING FOR RESPECTABILITY: HUGO CHAVEZ MEETS FOREIGN
PRESS

REF: (A) CARACAS 539, (B) CARACAS 265
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 CARACA 00853 01 OF 03 201320Z

CLASSIFIED BY [REDACTED] REASON 1.5(D)

SUMMARY

1. (U) SPORTING SUIT AND TIE IN LIEU OF HIS TRADEMARK FATIGUES
AND MAROON BERET, FORMER COUP LEADER AND CURRENT PRESIDENTIAL
CANDIDATE HUGO CHAVEZ [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] DURING A MARCH 11 PRESS CONFERENCE HOSTED BY THE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

CLASSIFIED BY DEPT. OF STATE, L. HEDGBETH, DAS, n/a

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REVIEW AUTHORITY: OSCAR J OLSON

CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)

DECLASSIFY AFTER: 19 MAR 2023

DATE/CASE ID: 15 JUL 2009 200503654

UNCLASSIFIED

Pag»

B6

B1

UNCLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

Page: 295

n/a

FOREIGN PRESS ASSOCIATION. HE TOLD REPORTERS THAT "BASIC INDUSTRIES, INCLUDING OIL, STEEL, AND ALUMINUM, MUST STAY IN STATE HANDS." WITH RESPECT TO COMPANIES ALREADY PRIVATIZED, A CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT WOULD "STUDY PRIVATIZATIONS ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS, MODIFYING CONTRACTS, IF NECESSARY, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW." CHAVEZ ACKNOWLEDGED GLOBALIZATION "AS A FACT" AND SAID HE EMBRACED IT, BUT "THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT FOR THE FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS." CALLING HIMSELF "A SOLDIER OF THE PEOPLE," CHAVEZ INTIMATED THAT THE ARMY IS AT ABOUT HALF ITS DESIRABLE STRENGTH AND THAT ITS MISSION SHOULD BE REORIENTED TOWARD CIVIL ACTION ON A MASSIVE SCALE. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) AS PART OF A CONTINUING SERIES OF PRESS CONFERENCES WITH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, THE FOREIGN PRESS ASSOCIATION INVITED FORMER COUP LEADER HUGO CHAVEZ TO ITS OFFICES AT THE CARACAS HILTON IN THE EVENING OF MARCH 11. [REDACTED] CHAVEZ WAS POLITE, EVEN SOLICITOUS TO THE ROOMFUL OF ABOUT 20 REPORTERS [REDACTED]

B1

B1

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 CARACA 00853 01 OF 03 201320Z

BASIC INDUSTRIES, "OUR NATIONAL PATRIMONY"

3. (U) MOST OF THE QUESTIONS CONCERNED ECONOMIC POLICY, PARTICULARLY CHAVEZ'S ATTITUDE TOWARD PRIVATIZATION. CHAVEZ TOLD THE REPORTERS HE IS NOT OPPOSED TO PRIVATIZATION PER SE BUT "BASIC INDUSTRIES, INCLUDING OIL, STEEL, AND ALUMINUM, MUST STAY IN STATE HANDS" BECAUSE THEY ARE "OUR NATIONAL PATRIMONY." WHEN A REPORTER ASKED WHAT HE WOULD DO ABOUT PRIVATIZATIONS CONSUMMATED BEFORE HE TOOK OFFICE, CHAVEZ RESPONDED THAT HE WOULD "STUDY PRIVATIZATIONS ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS, MODIFYING CONTRACTS, IF NECESSARY, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAW." HE STRESSED THAT A CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT WILL RECOGNIZE THE OBLIGATIONS OF PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS AND WILL NOT CANCEL ANY COMMERCIAL CONTRACT EXCEPT THROUGH LAWFUL MEANS.

"NOT GOING TO THROW OUT MULTINATIONALS"

4. (U) WITH RESPECT TO THE OIL OPENING, CHAVEZ CITED WITH APPROVAL THE ADVOCACY WORK OF FUNDAPATRIA, A PRIVATE INSTITUTION WHICH HAS CRITICIZED THE GOV'S PETROLEUM POLICY ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT ILLEGALLY HANDED OVER VENEZUELA'S MOST VALUABLE DEPOSITS TO FOREIGN INTERESTS AND CAUSED CRUDE PRICES TO FALL BY DELIBERATELY

n/a

CONFIDENTIAL

Pag»

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

Page: 296

n/a

EXCEEDING OPEC PRODUCTION QUOTAS. HE SAID, HOWEVER, "WE ARE NOT GOING TO THROW MULTINATIONALS OUT OF THE COUNTRY," AND HE WELCOMED FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN THE PETROCHEMICAL, NATURAL GAS, AGRICULTURE, AND BANKING SECTORS. WHEN A REPORTER POINTED OUT THAT CHAVEZ'S ATTITUDE TOWARD FOREIGN INVESTMENT IS NOT APPRECIABLY DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF FORMER PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ, WHOM CHAVEZ

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 CARACA 00853 01 OF 03 201320Z
TRIED TO OVERTHROW IN A FEBRUARY 4, 1992, COUP, CHAVEZ RESPONDED:
"I DON'T HAVE ANY COMPLEXES ABOUT THAT. IF PEREZ AGREES WITH ME,
I CONGRATULATE HIM FOR BEING RIGHT."

EXCHANGE AND PRICE CONTROLS ARE "EXTREME MEASURES"

5. (U) ASKED IF A CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT WOULD RETURN TO EXCHANGE AND PRICE CONTROLS, CHAVEZ, CITING JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH, SAID A MARKET MUST FIRST OF ALL SERVE THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE. IF SUPPLY AND DEMAND "ARE NOT IN EQUILIBRIUM" OR MONOPOLIES OR OLIGOPOLIES HAMPER COMPETITION, CHAVEZ BELIEVES THE STATE MUST INTERVENE. HOWEVER, HE SAID EXCHANGE AND PRICE CONTROLS ARE "EXTREME MEASURES" TO BE EMPLOYED ONLY IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

"TIME NOT RIGHT" FOR FTAA

6. (U) CHAVEZ SAID "BOLIVARIAN DOCTRINE" ACKNOWLEDGED GLOBALIZATION "AS A FACT" AND EMBRACED IT. HE CAUTIONED, HOWEVER, THAT ECONOMIC INTEGRATION MUST BE GRADUAL AND PROGRESSIVE STARTING

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL PTQ7801

PAGE 01 CARACA 00853 02 OF 03 201320Z
ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	AID-00	ACQ-01	CEA-01	CIAE-00
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	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	P-00	CIO-00	SP-00

n/a

CONFIDENTIAL

Page»

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

Page: 297

n/a

SSO-00 STR-00 TRSE-00 T-00 PMB-00 DSCC-00 PRM-10
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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
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DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 CARACAS 000853

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CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 CARACA 00853 02 OF 03 201320Z

WITH LATIN AMERICA AND LATER LOOKING TOWARD NORTH AMERICA AND
EUROPE. HE SAID HE AGREED WITH BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT FERNANDO
HENRIQUE CARDOSO THAT MERCOSUR MUST BE CONSOLIDATED SO THAT LATIN
AMERICA CAN NEGOTIATE FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH WITH THE UNITED
STATES AND CANADA. WHEN ASKED IF HEMISPHERIC INTEGRATION WILL BE
POSSIBLE BY 2005, CHAVEZ SAID SIMPLY, "THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT FOR
THE FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS."

"PROFESSIONALIZING" AND ENLARGING THE ARMY

7. (U) CHAVEZ SAID VENEZUELA NEEDS LESS BUREAUCRACY AND MORE
MILITARY. HE NOTED THAT VENEZUELA HAS MORE MINISTERS (27) THAN
DOES THE UNITED STATES AND SAID 8 OR 9 ARE ENOUGH FOR A COUNTRY
THIS SIZE. THE MILITARY, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS UNWISELY BEEN
REDUCED TO HALF ITS DESIRABLE STRENGTH. "WORSE," HE SAID, "THERE
HAS BEEN A DETERIORATION OF ITS PHYSICAL, ETHICAL, AND MORAL
STRUCTURE." HE COMPLAINED THAT VENEZUELAN SOLDIERS TODAY ARE LIKE
UNTRAINED NIGHT WATCHMEN WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO VIOLATE THE BORDER
SO THEY CAN SHOOT HIM. INSTEAD, CHAVEZ ARGUED, THE MILITARY SHOULD
BE "PROFESSIONALIZED" AND ITS MISSION REORIENTED TOWARD ECONOMIC,

n/a

CONFIDENTIAL

Pag»

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

Page: 298

n/a

SCIENTIFIC, AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT. HE ENVISIONED THE ARMY AS "TEACHERS OF CHILDREN," REVIVING AN OLD PROJECT TO BUILD A RAILROAD IN ZULIA, AND RECLAIMING THE BORDER AREAS.

BREAK WITH "CONTINUISM" OF LAST 40 YEARS

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 CARACA 00853 02 OF 03 201320Z

8. (U) WHEN PRESSED BY REPORTERS TO DEFINE HIMSELF IDEOLOGICALLY, CHAVEZ RECALLED THAT HE HAS BEEN VARIOUSLY DESCRIBED BY OTHERS AS A LEFTIST, POPULIST, TERRORIST, AND FASCIST. HE SAID HE HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF BEING A STOOGE OF FIDEL CASTRO, OF HAVING MADE A PACT WITH FORMER RIGHT-WING DICTATOR PEREZ JIMENEZ, AND OF SECRETLY IMPORTING ARMS FROM FRANCE TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT. HE SAID THE LABEL HE LIKED BEST IS "PATERNALIST" BECAUSE, "I HAVE A DAUGHTER FIVE MONTHS OLD, AND WHAT I WANT FOR HER IS WHAT I WANT FOR ALL OF THE CHILDREN OF VENEZUELA." POLITICALLY, HE SAID, HE IS "A SOLDIER OF THE PEOPLE, A BOLIVARIAN OF NEITHER THE LEFT NOR THE RIGHT," WHO WANTS TO BREAK WITH THE "CONTINUISM" OF THE LAST 40 YEARS.

LEGACY OF FEBRUARY 1992 COUP

9. (U) CHAVEZ SAID HIS FEBRUARY 4, 1992, COUP MARKS A TURNING POINT IN VENEZUELAN HISTORY, I.E., THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF A SPENT AND CORRUPT TWO-PARTY POLITICAL SYSTEM ESTABLISHED IN 1958 WITH THE FALL OF THE PEREZ JIMENEZ REGIME. THE FIRST "DIRECT CONSEQUENCE OF FEBRUARY 4" WAS THEN PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ'S BEING FORCED OUT OF OFFICE AND SPLITTING THE DEMOCRATIC ACTION PARTY (AD). THIS PROCESS, "BEGUN ON FEBRUARY 4," CONTINUES WITH CLAUDIO PERMIN'S EXIT FROM THE PARTY, CHAVEZ CLAIMED. THE SAME IS HAPPENING IN THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (COPEI) WHICH PARTY FOUNDER RAFAEL CALDERA ABANDONED IN ORDER TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT IN 1993. CURRENT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IRENE SAEZ AND HENRIQUE SALAS ROMER, CHAVEZ SAID, ARE CAUSING COPEI TO SPLINTER AGAIN. CHAVEZ STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT "THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT HAS NOT CHANGED, AND CORRUPTION HAS ACTUALLY INCREASED" OVER THE LAST SIX

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 CARACA 00853 02 OF 03 201320Z
YEARS.

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CONFIDENTIAL

Pag»

UNCLASSIFIED

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY HAS "TRUE LEGITIMACY"

10. (U) CHAVEZ AT VARIOUS TIMES SAID THAT REAL CHANGE COMES "FROM BELOW," "IN THE STREETS," OR "FROM THE PEOPLE." HE ARGUED THAT THE BEST VEHICLE FOR CHANGE, "FOR BRINGING THE PROMISE OF FEBRUARY 4 INTO FRUITION," IS THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY. WHEN A REPORTER SAID SUCH A MEASURE IS DICTATORIAL, CHAVEZ RESPONDED CALMLY: "OUR PLAN IS DEMOCRATIC. THERE WILL BE A REFERENDUM IN WHICH WE ASK THE PEOPLE: DO YOU WANT A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY? YES OR NO, WE WILL ACCEPT WHATEVER THE PEOPLE WANT." CHAVEZ SAID THE CURRENT CONGRESS IS TOO NARROWLY BASED ON POLITICAL PARTIES; A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY WILL BE REPRESENTATIVE OF ALL SECTORS OF SOCIETY AND THEREFORE HAVE "TRUE LEGITIMACY." CHAVEZ SKIRTED A QUESTION HOW ASSEMBLY MEMBERS WILL BE CHOSEN, SAYING ONLY THAT HE HAS A TEAM OF EXPERTS LOOKING INTO THAT.

TRADITIONAL PARTIES "A SPENT FORCE"

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL PTQ7807

PAGE 01 CARACA 00853 03 OF 03 201321Z
ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	AID-00	ACQ-01	CEA-01	CIAE-00
	COME-00	CTME-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00
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n/a
CONFIDENTIAL

Pag»

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

Page: 300

n/a

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 CARACAS 000853

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/15/01

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CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 CARACA 00853 03 OF 03 201321Z

11. (U) SURVEYING THE POLITICAL SCENE, CHAVEZ SAID, "IRENE SAEZ IS A QUESTION MARK. NO ONE KNOWS WHAT HER PROPOSAL IS." CLAUDIO FERMIN, HE SAID, REPRESENTS "THE CONTINUIST MODEL OF NEOLIBERALISM." CHAVEZ IS NOT CONCERNED ABOUT THE POWER OF AD'S AND COPEI'S "ELECTORAL MACHINERY" BECAUSE "IN WAR, MACHINES ARE ONLY AS GOOD AS THE MORALE OF THE MEN WHO MANIPULATE THEM, AND THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES ARE A SPENT FORCE."

"TRAINED FOR COMBAT"

12. (U) ASKED IF HE WILL ACCEPT DEFEAT AT THE POLLS WITHOUT CAUSING TROUBLE, CHAVEZ SAID HE HAS DEvised A THREE-PART "ANTI-FRAUD PLAN." FIRST, HE CLAIMED THAT HIS MOVEMENT IS MOBILIZING THE 6 MILLION PEOPLE WHO DID NOT BOTHER TO TURN OUT FOR PREVIOUS ELECTIONS AND THAT "WE WILL WIN THIS ELECTION BY A KNOCKOUT." SECOND, "WE WILL HAVE OUR OWN MACHINERY AT THE POLLING PLACES TO DEFEND OUR VOTES. FINALLY, "WE HAVE COMPLETE CONFIDENCE THAT THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY WILL RESPECT THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE, NOT BECAUSE THEY FAVOR ANY PARTICULAR CANDIDATE, BUT OUT OF THEIR SENSE OF DUTY." CHAVEZ ADDED, "I WAS TRAINED FOR COMBAT, BOTH MILITARY AND POLITICAL, IN THE TRADITION OF BOLIVAR."

"DEEP FAITH"

13. (U) THE 43-YEAR-OLD FORMER LIEUTENANT COLONEL OF THE ARMY, RESPONDING TO A FEW PERSONAL QUESTIONS, SAID HE IS MARRIED AND HAS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 CARACA 00853 03 OF 03 201321Z
FOUR CHILDREN. (NOTE: HE IS DIVORCED AND RECENTLY REMARRIED.) HE

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CONFIDENTIAL

Pag»

UNCLASSIFIED

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IS NOW LIVING IN A BORROWED APARTMENT IN THE UP-SCALE COUNTRY CLUB SECTION OF CARACAS. HE SAID HE IS VERY PROUD OF HIS MILITARY SERVICE. ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN MANY THREATS AGAINST HIM, HE FEELS PROTECTED "BY MY MILLIONS OF SUPPORTERS AND BY MY DEEP FAITH AS A CHRISTIAN AND A CATHOLIC." (NOTE: CHAVEZ HAS MENTIONED HIS RELIGIOUS FAITH IN A NUMBER OF RECENT INTERVIEWS.)

TRAVEL PLANS

14. (C) CHAVEZ TOLD THE REPORTERS HE IS GOING TO LONDON IN EARLY MAY AND POSSIBLY TO FRANCE AND GERMANY. QUESTIONED ABOUT WHOM HE INTENDED TO MEET IN THOSE COUNTRIES, HE SAID THE PROGRAM IS STILL BEING WORKED OUT BUT WOULD INCLUDE "ALL SECTORS OF POWER, CULTURE, BUSINESS, ETC."

COMMENT: "THE CANDIDATE OF DISCONTENT"

15. (C) THE QUESTIONING FROM THE FOREIGN PRESS WAS MUCH MORE AGGRESSIVE AND POINTED THAN WHAT CHAVEZ IS ACCUSTOMED TO. HE COULD NOT RAIL AGAINST THE CORRUPT, SPOUT WACKY POLITICAL THEORY, OR MISQUOTE "GREAT THINKERS" WITHOUT BEING CHALLENGED. ECONOMIC POLICY IS NOT HIS FORTE, AND HE CLEARLY DID NOT ENJOY BEING FORCED TO ELABORATE ON HIS PAT ANSWERS. HE NEVERTHELESS DID NOT LOSE HIS COMPOSURE AND CAME ACROSS AS SINCERE, ATTENTIVE, AND CONTROLLED.

16. (C) THE PUBLIC OPINION POLLS NOW LOOK GOOD TO CHAVEZ, PLACING
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 CARACA 00853 03 OF 03 201321Z
HIM SECOND ONLY TO IRENE SAEZ AND SHOWING HIM TO BE THE ONLY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE GAINING IN POPULARITY. IT IS TOO EARLY, HOWEVER, TO GLEAN MUCH FROM POLL RESULTS, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THAT NEITHER OF THE LARGEST POLITICAL PARTIES HAS CHOSEN ITS CANDIDATE. CHAVEZ AIDE AND NATIONAL DEPUTY CARLOS MELO TOLD US TWO WEEKS BEFORE THAT THE EXOGENOUS FACTOR LIKELY TO BE DECISIVE IN THE ELECTION IS THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY -- THE WORSE FOR THE COUNTRY, THE BETTER FOR CHAVEZ. MELO CALLED CHAVEZ "THE CANDIDATE OF DISCONTENT" WHO OFFERS THE ONLY GENUINE ALTERNATIVE TO THE "FAILED NEOLIBERAL ECONOMIC POLICIES" THAT ALL OTHER CANDIDATES ESPOUSE. MELO IS CORRECT IN IDENTIFYING THE SOURCE OF CHAVEZ'S APPEAL AND HIS NICHE WITH THE ELECTORATE.

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CONFIDENTIAL

Pag»

B1

UNCLASSIFIED
CONFIDENTIAL
n/a

Page: 302

MAISTO

CONFIDENTIAL

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n/a
CONFIDENTIAL

Pag»

UNCLASSIFIED